

# Canyoning adventure helps Marines build confidence, camaraderie

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In search of an activity that would instill unit cohesion as well as present a personal challenge to the participants, the noncommissioned officers of Marine Corps Forces Europe recently embarked on a “canyoning” event in the Swiss Alps.

“I had no idea what canyoning was,” said Sgt. Brandon Cox from Moreno Valley, Calif. “I had my doubts at the beginning, [but] the whole trip surpassed my expectations by far.”

“None of us really knew what we were getting into at the beginning,” said Cpl. Armando Rodriguez. “But throughout this trip we all took a little closer look at each other, and ourselves.”

The adventure began immediately as the anticipated three-hour drive from Böblingen to Switzerland took six hours – and finding the right camp with very vague directions became an adventure in itself. However, the young Marine leaders managed to reach their destination only slightly rattled.

Grudgingly leaving the warmth and security of quality sleeping bags a little earlier than most would have preferred, the group arose the next morning to meet a guide from an extreme sports company called Swiss Adventures who seemed a little too chipper for that hour.

“I have to admit, there was a time in the morning when I was laying there hoping they would not show up,” said Cpl. Joseph Lambeth, Houston, Texas. “I had no idea what a great time this would turn out to be.”

The guide explained that the participants would be led from the top of a mountain through a canyon. The path included a series of obstacles that required negotiating steep hills, jumping into 42-degree water, rappelling down sheer walls and sliding down waterfalls.

After being fitted with the appropriate gear and instructed on safety, the group was now hanging on to the guide’s every

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word to traverse the treacherous terrain unharmed.

“Let’s be nice to the guy who can help us live or die today,” said Sgt. Charles Blackman.

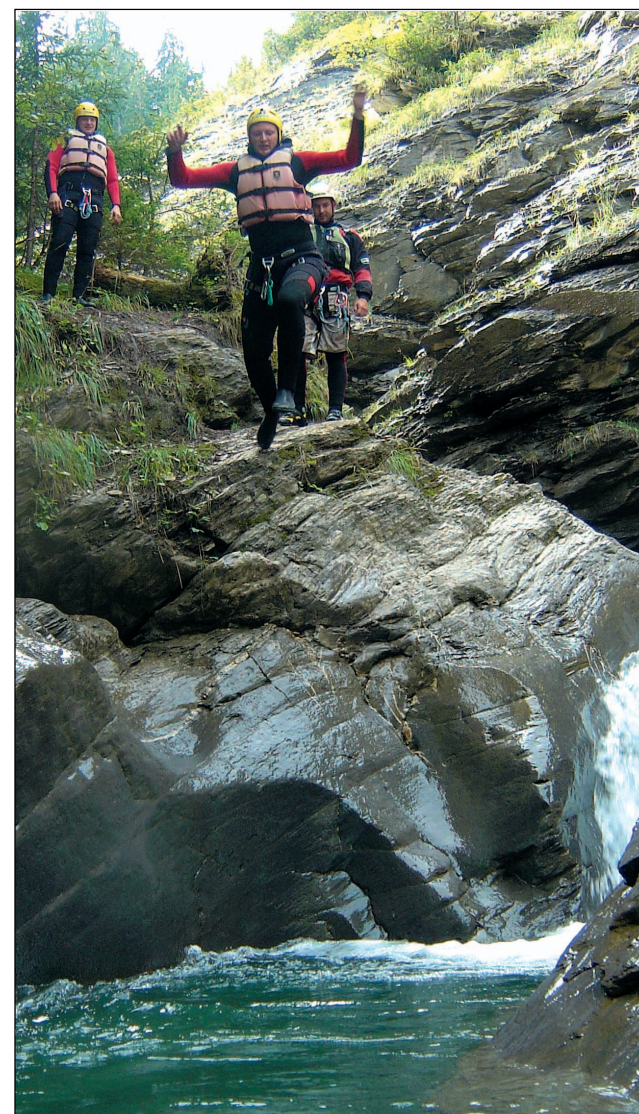
Just minutes into the trip came the first test of courage, as the trail dropped off and the only way down was a plunge into water so cold it numbed the fear of the jump.

“I was more excited than scared,” said Cpl. Jason Kraus. “The first jump was a rush and a half – that water was freezing.”

“Overcoming our own challenges and then helping each other really showed us that no matter who you are, every Marine wants to succeed,” Rodriguez said. “Even some who were really scared at times still did all the stuff everybody else did because we wanted to finish as a team.”

“I would never have done something like this in my life without this kind of trip,” said Cpl. Abel Orta.

“NCOs really are the backbone of the Marine Corps,” said MARFOREUR Command Sgt. Maj. Carlton Kent. “It’s important for [NCOs] to develop the strong sense of camaraderie that will make them into stronger leaders of Marines.”



courtesy Swiss Adventures

Sgt. Brandon Cox is about to find out how cold the water is on the first such jump of a Marine Corps bonding trip. Awaiting their turns are Cpl. Abel Orta (left) and a guide.